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Letter dated 23 January 2004 from the Permanent Representative of Côte d'Ivoire to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to enclose herewith the text of the speech delivered by President Laurent Gbagbo on 20 January 2004 to the diplomatic corps accredited in Côte d'Ivoire, to mark the New Year (see annex). This message essentially deals with the resolution of the crisis that the country has been experiencing for nearly 16 months.

I should be grateful if you could arrange to have the text of this letter and its annex published as a Security Council document.

(*Signed*) Philippe **Djangone-Bi**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 23 January 2004 from the Permanent Representative of Côte d'Ivoire to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

Address by President Laurent Gbagbo to the Diplomatic Corps

(20 January 2004)

Ambassadors,
Chairpersons of institutions,
Ministers,
Journalists,
Friends,

I am pleased to see this ceremony taking place this year since, as you will all remember, it was not possible for it to take place last year. On this date last year, we had to marshal our forces to save Côte d'Ivoire. We did not have the time to gather to congratulate ourselves and wish each other a happy new year. This meeting therefore represents progress, and I wish to express this progress and give it the praise it deserves.

Members of the diplomatic corps, representatives of international institutions, I wish you a very good 2004. I wish you and your families a good year. And I also wish your countries, the sovereign rulers who have accredited you here in Côte d'Ivoire, a good year. I wish peace to reign on earth and that, in our underdeveloped and underdemocratized Africa, we will achieve peace even as we build structures of peace.

Your Excellency Monsignor Zerari,

I listened to your statement, and I liked it because it is the statement of a friend. It is my belief that nothing can prevent us from achieving peace, and, precisely, you must struggle against the impatient ones. The impatient ones, to whom you refer. The impatient ones because of whom the children of Israel stoned Moses in the desert. They were wrong, for Moses was leading them irreversibly towards the promised land. They took 40 years to do so, but they reached it. I do not wish us to take 40 years to achieve peace. I would like us to achieve peace tomorrow. But we must achieve genuine peace, not artificial peace. This is why all issues are being examined thoroughly, and I am pleased to see how hard Côte d'Ivoire is working towards this goal.

When one has spent one's life struggling under a single party to have the right to speak, to have a multiparty system, I assure you that it can be a pleasure to see people go on strike against oneself, for this is the very right we struggled for. This is the right for which we lost a few months, a few years of our freedom.

But Ivorians now know that without peace, they cannot even exercise this right. You see, there were no strikes while war was being waged. There were no movements in any city, in any service. Everyone was tense. Everyone was braced for war. Everyone was wondering about his own future. But as soon as spring arrived and a few flowers began to bloom on the trees, everyone rejoiced. I rejoice for the people of Côte d'Ivoire, but I ask them to give me a bit of time to fully achieve

peace. After which, they can reclaim the right to strike, to which every sovereign people is entitled. Therefore, we will achieve peace.

There is no other solution today than to achieve peace. I think that everyone has understood. All the parties in conflict have understood that there is no solution but peace. We therefore want peace.

Everyone wants peace. I myself find that this process is too slow. But, from my perspective, I cannot take hurdles two or three at a time. I am obliged to take one hurdle at a time. At my pace, if someone tries to take two hurdles at a time he falls and ends up last. I have no desire to be last. Therefore, I take one hurdle at a time. This way I am sure to reach the end of the forest. Before I let you go back to your families, I would like to make some comment on a few issues of current interest.

It is true that there is currently some grumbling on television. But this is normal. And I am surprised to see so many explanations being offered for something that is quite ordinary.

This minister is making reforms. He appoints managers, the people in his service are not happy, they grumble. This is a sign of democracy. Let it be. We are working to resolve this crisis, which is not really a crisis at all. We might even have resolved it, if I had not been absent, but I have appointed a minister to hold talks with all sides. He will brief me tonight and tomorrow we shall see where the discussion stood before I left. But I want to say that this is nothing abnormal, nothing that runs counter to peace. It is not an insurmountable problem; we will resolve it. I have seen worse things since taking office. We shall work together with all the parties to find a reasonable solution that respects each and every person. Please, do not give a problem more importance than it actually has. That is the first issue I wanted to comment on.

The second comment concerns the referendum. People have divergent, opposing points of view ... I have never seen a democratic country where opposing views are not voiced as soon as the President of the Republic announces a referendum. So this is completely normal. If Ivorians had not expressed themselves on this issue I would have been worried. If they express conflicting views, that is normal democratic life. So I will not raise this again. I simply wanted to clarify a few points.

There is some confusion about these issues submitted to referendum. There is one issue that I did not decide to submit to referendum. I do not have the last say on this; the Constitution does. Some say that Marcoussis did not provide for two referendums, three referendums. Marcoussis did not provide for any referendums at all. Marcoussis does not decide how the instruments are adopted; the Constitution does

The Constitution states that in order for the Constitution itself to be amended, the text of the amendment has to be brought before the Parliament. A two-thirds vote is necessary and one that is done, the people are asked to decide by referendum. I do not say so; the Constitution does.

On the other issues, Ivorians must know that the President of the Republic can submit to referendum any issue he deems appropriate.

Any issue! Any issue whatsoever. Issues about which my compatriots have the right to express themselves. But in so doing, I did not ask their opinion. I avail myself of the right granted to me by the Constitution to ask their opinion when the time comes. Therein lies the problem. Therefore, people must not be concerned at the fact that there are many referendums. I prefer five or 10 referendums per year to one war.

Too much democracy does not kill peace. In fact there has never been such a thing as too much democracy. I therefore decided to submit a number of issues to referendum because that responsibility lies with me alone. And do not worry about whether these referendums confuse the replies to other questions, for that is a technical problem. There are technicians to do that work, and they will do their jobs. My job is political, to question the people about a particular issue, and I will do it! That is the comment I wished to make.

Another comment concerns the re-emergence of a number of issues within the army: The "demobilization of class 98-2A". I will speak about that with the military in a little while ... The famous "zinzins" and "bahéfoués", the announced demobilization of the recruits of classe 2001-2A, all those issues, I will speak about them with the military in a little while. The thing to remember is that we are heading towards peace and that since 4 December we have been on the path to achieving it.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would have liked to go 100 miles-per-hour, but my car is not very powerful, so I am going slowly, slowly, but surely. I thank you. God bless you!